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ABSTRACT

This report was requested by the Lunenburg, Massachusetts Public Schools through the Merrimack Education Center. Under the agreement with the Center, the consultant, with the assistance of several associates, evaluated the statewide program in the town of Lunenburg. Objectives were to determine the system's total evaluation needs from an instructional and administrative framework, to evaluate the current testing program and to recommend such changes in the program as are feasible within the current scope of the project and a structure that will permit the system to continue the development of the program. (Author/MV)

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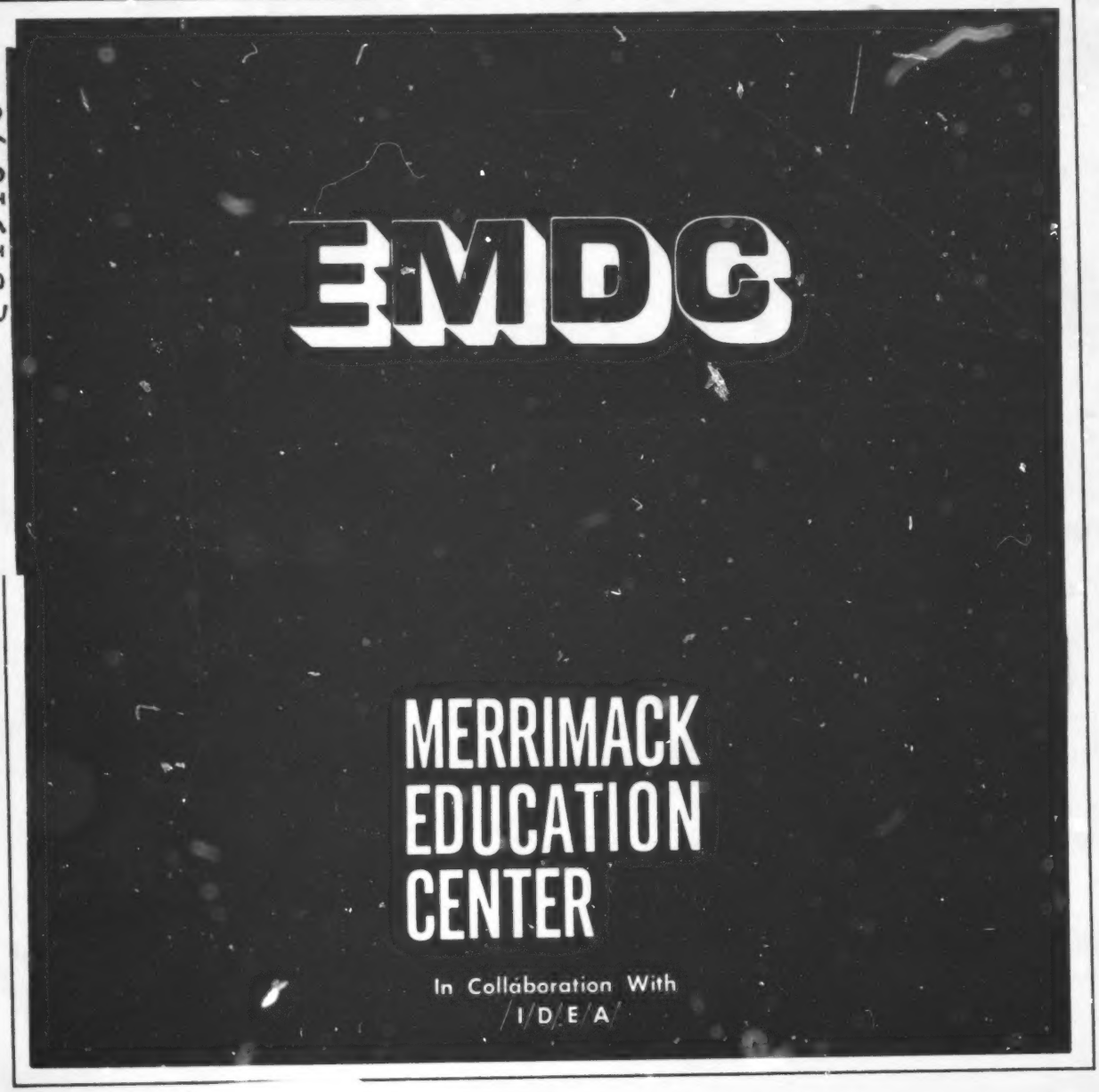

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A Report on the Proposed Assessment Program for the Lunenburg Public Schools

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A REPORT ON THE PROPOSED ASSESSMENT PROGRAM
Lunenburg Public Schools

BACKGROUND:

This report was requested by the Lunenburg Public Schools through the Merrimack Education Center. Under the agreement with the Center, this consultant, with the assistance of several associates, evaluated the systemwide program in the Town of Lunenburg.

Our objectives were to determine the system's total evaluation needs from an instructional and administrative framework, to evaluate the current testing program and to recommend such changes in the program as are feasible within the current scope of the project and a structure that will permit the system to continue the development of the program.

PROCEDURE:

The report draws on the work of the K-12 Testing Study Committee of the Lunenburg Public Schools, chaired by Burton E. Goodrich, Jr. The consultants met with the testing committee and with members of the faculty and staff in the elementary, middle and high schools. Where possible, the observations and concerns of the members of these groups were taken into account in the preparation of this final report.

The consultants reviewed the curriculum outlines of the school system and in the sixth grade, the texts used in the program of instruction in English. The curriculum outlines were reviewed with a test development specialist and from the major testing sources currently available those tests which appeared most compatible based on this review were selected. The draft proposal has been reviewed with members of the committee and faculty at each building to obtain advice prior to preparing this final report.

THE ASSESSMENT PROGRAM

GENERAL GOALS:

In organizing the Assessment Program, care was taken to insure that the needs of each group involved in education, that is the student, parents, teachers, administrators and elected officials, be taken into account in the design of the program. Students may be little interested in the results of a testing program until such time in the later grades as they begin to make decisions for themselves about themselves and their future. Parents need to be involved in a systematic way so that at least in certain periods of time in their child's education, there will be a complete review of the student's progress as it will be evaluated in a variety of ways. Teachers are interested in independent assessments of student ability to provide a comparison with their own evaluation. Where possible, the tests used are even more helpful if they can provide diagnostic results on a student's performance. School system administrators, perhaps, have the largest involvement in the Assessment Program with a responsibility for the organization, gathering, dissemination, and interpretation of the results to faculty, parents and other interested members of the community. Because objective, standardized instruments can provide a convenient basis for comparison which is not available through teacher evaluations, an Assessment Program may be seen by some to have a higher degree of utility for school system management of the educational process than for any of the other functions. However, the program must also meet the needs of curriculum and planning and delivery of student services if it is to be truly useful to a school system.

The basic purposes to be served by the Assessment Program would be evaluation of individual and class performance, guidance regarding placement in certain groups and information to assist in a student's self-understanding. Evaluation would involve a comparison of the growth in student performance over a period of time. If resources permitted, it could also involve evaluation of different strategies for achieving gains in such areas as reading or language arts competencies. Evaluation would also involve the monitoring of trends over time. It might reflect the changing nature of a school population, which would suggest the need for different programs and services to meet these changing conditions.

Placement decisions are usually made on the basis of a number of factors, the primary one being teacher evaluation. Information from the Assessment Program should help in identifying those students who are in need of remedial work in certain areas and also those who might benefit from an accelerated program. In the case of the language arts area, it may assist in the appropriate placement of students as they begin their programs in the language area. Follow-up studies done by the system could evaluate the effectiveness of the different items of information available as decisions are made by and for students in regard to their progress in the school system.

At the grade 8-10 level, aptitude and interest tests are suggested to help students get a better understanding of their potential as they begin to make plans for their high school program. This approach presumes the availability of a strong supporting student personnel program at the high school to assist all students as they plan for careers or postsecondary education.

At this point in their program, students as well as parents would become the recipient of reports of the students' performance on the various measures. It will be important to educate students in the use of the various items of information in their decision-making processes.

TESTING SCHEDULE:

Test only when necessary. Using that maxim, certain grades stand out as logical points of information-gathering. Beginning in grade 2 with the Achievement Basic Battery, the teachers and principals would obtain a picture of performance after the children's first experience with content learning. In grade 4, the results would provide a summary as the population moves to the middle school at the end of their elementary school experience. Both tests would be administered in the spring.

In grades 5 and 6, diagnostic tests in basic areas are recommended to aid in strengthening student skills during the remainder of their middle school program. A language aptitude battery could be useful before students begin modern language study.

In grade 7, the complete achievement battery would be administered in the fall as students prepared to leave the middle school. The move to a fall administration is necessary in order for the information to be available for decisions to be made in the spring.

Consideration was given to an achievement test in grade 8, and this option remains open to the school. However, the potential benefit does not seem to warrant a battery at this time. One option would be the inclusion of a comprehensive Mathematics achievement test with diagnostic potential. This particular grade level should be studied after the Assessment Program has been operating for a year to determine more precisely what is needed.

Early in grade 8, the aptitude and interest measures would be administered. These results along with the previous school record and the grade 7 achievement battery results would be used by students, parents and counselors in making decisions about their program of studies in high school.

In a restoration of achievement testing in the high school, the basic battery is recommended on an annual basis. The objective, comparative data coupled with teacher evaluations and guidance support, could assist students in modifying their program of studies in a more realistic, personally desirable direction. At the same time, faculty and administrators would have valuable information on student performance essential to any discussion of minimum levels of competency acceptable to the school.

Reading assessment would occur on an almost annual basis. The approach would combine a separate reading achievement test (grades 1, 3, 7 for non-language students, and 9; a diagnostic test (grades 5 and 6); and a reading achievement test as part of a basic battery (grades 2, 4, 7 and 10). Consideration should be given to the use of the diagnostic exams in grade 3 for both arithmetic and reading.

Finally, the last measure recommended is an attitudinal assessment of graduating seniors in grade 12 on a periodic but not annual basis.

INSTRUMENTS:

The proposed Assessment Program relies heavily on a broad survey achievement test and includes measures of intelligence or general ability, interest, and student attitudes. Consideration was given to the elimination of any intelligence or general ability measure; however, it was felt that, on balance, the advantages of retaining a very limited use of this type of instrument in the third grade and eighth grade was warranted. It is recommended that the results of these administrations be reported in stanines which would permit a comparison with achievement tests reported in the same fashion. This approach would reduce the possibility of overemphasis on small differences in test results between students.

The achievement test recommended is one that has been used by the system for some time. The major changes recommended are the addition of a diagnostic reading and arithmetic test in grades five and six and the addition of a portion of the high school basic battery on an experimental basis in grade 10. The experimental nature is suggested by the difficulty in finding instruments that would be readily available, inexpensive and yet coincide with the course of studies offered by the school. It is recommended that the system obtain item analyses of any achievement test results obtained on the high school population, and working closely with department heads and teachers, determine the appropriateness of the

instrument with respect to the curriculum covered in the various disciplines. There are several phenomena that can occur at this level -- scores can be depressed because the test content is measuring achievement in areas that are not included in the course of study; on the other hand, the results may represent a failure of the students to perform in areas where it might be considered reasonable to expect performance equivalent to the regional or national population.

The fact that the task will be difficult should not dissuade the faculty and staff from becoming involved in an achievement testing program at the high school level; nor should the fact that tests are not available in courses of study other than the most popular for the middle areas be considered reason for dropping the search. If programs of study are worth offering, then they are worth evaluating. Constraints of time and money would dictate that the less heavily enrolled areas be evaluated on a cyclical basis rather than annual; however, they should not be overlooked.

A vocational or career interest measure in the past has been considered an optional measure for students. However, with the current emphasis on planning for careers or education beyond high school, it is important that each student as part of a planned guidance program take time to formally review his own interests and compare them with his abilities and achievements to begin to lay out a plan for his future development. Such an approach would require that student personnel services be provided to each student regardless of his or her post high school plans and would tie in with current career planning activities under way at the school.

As one final measure in an evaluation that may be most useful to the system and to future students, it is recommended that an attitudinal survey be given to graduating seniors to obtain some information on their reaction to their experiences at the school. Related forms of the questionnaire are available for teachers and administrators and should be used periodically to assess the climate in the school. These measures may involve a sampling of the high school class each year or the administration of the questionnaire to the total graduating class every second or third year.

ORGANIZATION:

Coordination and central support is essential in any program involving the collection, dissemination and use of assessment data across all grade levels and over an extended period of time. A lack of articulation across building levels was observed in the system. While the Testing Committee is representative of the system, the members do not have administrative responsibility for coordination. All of the faculty and staff involved in this study were quite willing and desirous of sharing information with others to help improve the instructional and educational process.

The appointment of a Director of Pupil Personnel Services, reporting to the Superintendent is recommended. This individual would be responsible for the Assessment Program in grades K-12 as well as the Guidance Services. The functions would include test selection, administration, dissemination of results, training and technical support for faculty and staff. Close working relationships with faculty are essential to the position as faculty should play a major role in developing and carrying out the plan.

TRAINING:

Faculty and staff need periodic training to permit them to take advantage of an Assessment Program. Such in-service activity could focus not only on the use of specific tests in the Assessment Program but also on the general area of the measurement of student achievement through teacher observation and testing. While no standardized criterion-referenced tests were suggested for the Assessment Program, faculty should be encouraged to develop and evaluate their own local instruments for specific areas not covered by standardized tests. Such efforts would need support by the system to be effective.

ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT.

Technical assistance for data analysis and test construction and use can be obtained from publishers or consultants. For long-term effectiveness of a local assessment program, the possibility of a cooperative effort with several towns or the Merrimack Education Center should be considered. Joint activities could involve the development of scoring services, sharing the development and use of data analysis programs, research on the effects of various instructional approaches, development of group normative data by similar towns and other evaluative efforts.

EVALUATING THE EVALUATION:

The Testing Study Committee should continue to function, under the chairmanship of the individual responsible for the testing program. The committee would review the effectiveness of the assessment program; recommend modifications, suggest areas most in need of attention, and assist in the implementation of the program.

EXTERNAL TESTING PROGRAMS:

While a number of students take part in various testing programs such as the Scholastic Aptitude Test, the results of those tests, while reported to a school committee for information purposes, do not form part of the school's assessment program. Participation in such programs is elected by the student based on individual college or career plans. Thus, there is no control over the population tested. The examinations also were designed for specific purposes not connected with program evaluation in a school. For this reason, organizations such as the College Board take pains to focus attention on the appropriate guidance and college admissions functions performed by this instrument.

LUNENBURG PUBLIC SCHOOLS
PROPOSED ASSESSMENT PROGRAM

GRADE	INSTRUMENT	REPORT	OBJECTIVE
K Winter/ Spring	Informal Reading Skills Analysis	Teacher	Readiness
Grade 1 Spring	Stanford Reading	Teacher System	Monitor progress of individuals Develop a profile of performance
Grade 2 Spring	Stanford Achievement 1973 Primary Level 1 Basic Battery	Teacher System	Aid in identifying special needs Develop profile of performance

Note: Screening component will be developed separately for K, Grade 1

Grade 3 Fall	Otis-Lennon	Teacher System	Measure developed ability for comparison with student performance
Spring	Stanford Reading Achievement Level 11	Teacher System	Identify students needing remediation Monitor progress of the class
Grade 4 Spring	Stanford Achievement 1973, Ed., Basic Battery	Parent Teacher System	Report on student performance on comparative measures Compare achievement with measure of developed ability and classroom performance Evaluate student achievement Provide data useful in pupil assignments and curriculum development in Grade 5

LUNENBURG PUBLIC SCHOOLS
PROPOSED ASSESSMENT PROGRAM
Continued

GRADE	INSTRUMENT	REPORT	OBJECTIVE
Grade 5 Fall	Stanford Diagnostic Reading and Arithmetic	Teacher	Identify reading and arithmetic deficiencies
Grade 6 Fall	Stanford Diagnostic Reading and Arithmetic	Teacher	Identify reading and arithmetic deficiencies
Spring	Pimsleur Language Aptitude Battery	Teacher	Assist in instructional grouping
Grade 7 Fall	Stanford Achievement 1973 E., Complete Battery	Parent	Identify student strengths and weaknesses. Aid in decision-making for Grades 8 and 9
		Teacher	Adjust instructional program where appropriate
		System	Monitor progress of system Assist in pupil assignments for Grade 8. Determine range of student performance in each class
Spring	Stanford Reading Achievement (for non-language students)	Teacher	Monitor progress of individuals in reading program Arrange program to bring students to minimum Grade 8 compentency level

LUNENBURG PUBLIC SCHOOLS
PROPOSED ASSESSMENT PROGRAM
Continued

GRADE	INSTRUMENT	REPORT	OBJECTIVE
Grade 8 Fall	Differential Aptitude Test	Parent/ Student	Provide information on a range of abilities as an aid in decision-making
		Guidance Counselor/ Teacher	Assist in guidance process and course selection
		System	Describe and monitor general abilities
Fall	California Occupational Interest Test, or Self-Directed Search	Student/	Provide information for student decision-making
		Guidance Counselor	Aid in the counseling process
		System	Provide basis for career exploration program
Grade 9 Fall	Stanford High School Reading (for non-language students)	System	Screening for minimum competency levels

LUNENBURG PUBLIC SCHOOLS
PROPOSED ASSESSMENT PROGRAM
Continued

GRADE	INSTRUMENT	REPORT	OBJECTIVE
Grade 10 Fall	Stanford Achievement High School Basic Battery (annual)	Student/ Parent	Provide comparative data on achievement to aid in decision-making
		Teacher	Determine levels of achievement in departmental areas.
	Arts and Humanities (even years only)	Teacher	Modify student program where appropriate and possible
	Business and Economics (odd years only)	System	Identify students not meeting minimum levels of performance or capable of advanced-level work
			Monitor performance of students leaving the system
			Compare performance and grades
Grade 12 Spring	QUESTA (every third year)	System	Obtain systematic information about the attitudes of students, faculty and administrators toward their educational experience.
	(Questionnaire for Students, Teachers and Administrators)		Provide information that leads to constructive change in programs, policies and practices.

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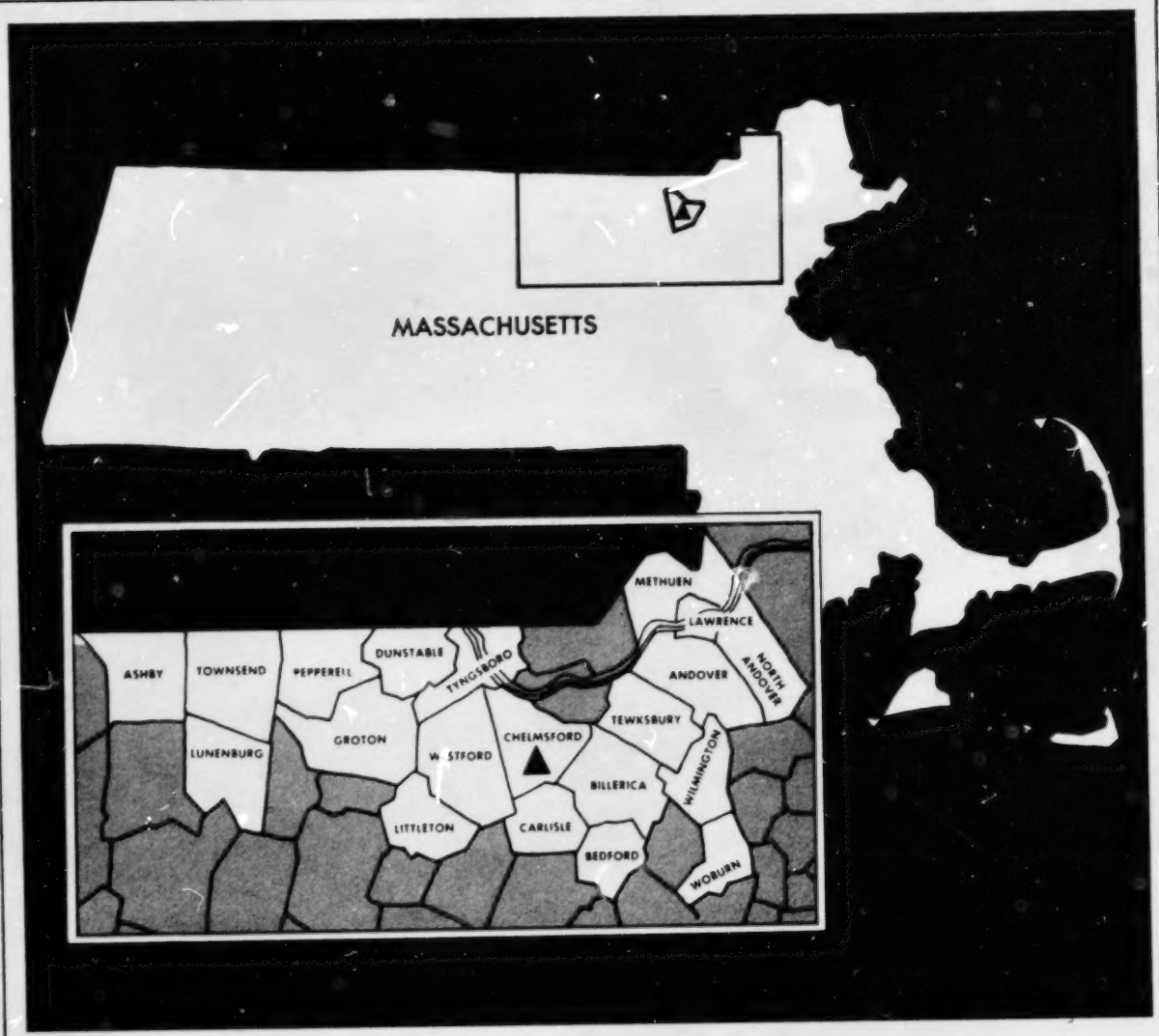

MERRIMACK EDUCATION CENTER

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